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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON PRESIDENT'S IRAQ SPEECH: FRENCH  
RESPONSE

REF: STATE 216314

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Poloff discussed the President's major policy speech on Iraq and the just-released U.S. strategy paper on Iraq with MFA DAS-equivalent for Iraq/Iran/Arabian Gulf affairs Antoine Sivan and MFA Iraq desk officer David Cvach November 30. Sivan welcomed our briefing, and said he would incorporate the President's speech and U.S. strategy paper on Iraq into briefing materials for Presidential Diplomatic Advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne's visit to Washington later this week. (Note: We also provided a copy of the executive summary from the U.S. strategy paper and a copy of the President's November 30 speech to Presidential Middle East Advisor Dominique Boche November 30.)

2. (C) After briefly reviewing the executive summary of the U.S. strategy paper, Sivan underlined three elements of GoF Iraq policy, concluding that he did not see major divergences between the U.S. and GoF approaches. First, he concurred that Iraq's stability would not be achieved overnight; the international community therefore needed to work cooperatively to help build a base for national political unity in Iraq, without which Iraq's reconstruction was not possible. Second, Iraq must find its own political model, without one being imposed from outside, which must entail a new political equilibrium, inclusive of all Iraqis. Thirdly, Sivan stressed that the GoF did not want to create problems for the U.S., but it would continue to insist on Iraqi sovereignty and territorial unity. Further on this point, Sivan asked to what extent the newly articulated U.S. strategy presaged a reduction of U.S. forces in Iraq, cautioning that France was being careful not to be seen calling for a U.S. withdrawal or timetable -- he cited PM Villepin's November 29 CNN interview as an example of the GoF's effort to remain constructive. Poloff stressed that the U.S. strategy would remain conditions-based and not linked to an artificial calendar; at the same time, the MNF-1 posture in Iraq would remain flexible and responsive to changing conditions.

3. (C) Comment: Despite Sivan's suggestion that the GoF and U.S. have convergent approaches on Iraq, he gave no indication of French willingness to offer additional assistance to achieve our shared goal of a democratic, stable Iraq. When pressed on new assistance, Sivan remained evasive and described existing French programs, such as student exchanges in France, in which some 500 Iraqis have participated since 2003, and French participation in the EU JUSTLEX rule of law training program, which has welcomed 40 Iraqi police officers so far. Sivan's readout on the November 28-29 FM Zebari visit to Paris, which offers additional details on the long-stalled French offer to train Iraqi police, is reported septel.

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Stapleton